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ABSTRACT

This paper examines factors in the very low college participation rate in certain south-central Pennsylvania counties, in order to develop strategies for increasing participation. The paper examines college participation through a series of interviews with elementary school students, recent high school graduates not attending college, school and community leaders, and college students from the area. The dominant socializing influences of family, school, and community formed the basis for analysis of the data. Interviews showed many lower-class parents took a laissez-faire attitude toward education and career choices, leaving responsibility with young teenagers, while middle-class parents insisted that children plan for high educational and career objectives. Schools reinforced this influence, channeling students into vocational or college preparatory courses in ninth grade. Respondents also saw counseling as reinforcing class values in college decisions. For many, obtaining a college education represented a potential threat to remaining in the area, although the possibility of outmigration could provide motivation for some working class students. Ironically, life is just good enough for many lower-class subjects in this study to produce comfort and self-satisfaction, rather than motivation to strive beyond their parents' class and educational status. This paper contains 23 references. (DHP)

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AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF LOW PARTICIPATION RATES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTHCENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA

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INTRODUCTION

The Center for Higher Education at Penn State University, in cooperation with the Mont Alto Campus, researched factors in the very low college participation rate in certain southcentral Pennsylvania counties with the long-term objective of developing and implementing strategies for increasing participation.

Higher education participation rates in the two-county area rank among the lowest in Pennsylvania and in the country. Franklin County is 60th and Adams 57th out of the 67 Pennsylvania counties. Pennsylvania, statewide, has one of the lowest participation rates in the nation, ranking 47th out of the 50 states. The average participation rate in the southcentral region is 29% of college-age high school graduates, compared to over 50% for the United States. This exceptionally low participation in higher education made this area an ideal laboratory for a study of the factors related to non-college attendance in rural America.

The education system of a nation directly reflects the values of that society. American democratic ideals provide the foundation for an educational system which values universal access and participation. The American dream of social mobility bases itself on the notion of universal educational opportunity. The link between the attainment of education and fame and fortune remains imperfect but still the best obtaining. Education provides not only individual prosperity but also the social benefits of a competent work force and an informed electorate.

The significant role higher education plays in an interdependent democratic society has increasing recognition (Bowen, 1977; Chickering, 1977). The development of community-based educational institutions gives tangible evidence of the American ideal of providing educational opportunity for

everyone. However, despite much progress toward this goal, full utilization of higher education has yet to be realized.

What happens to the American higher education ideal -- and the social mobility it fosters -- in Franklin County, Pennsylvania, and in many other rural counties in the United States? Even more important, why should we care what happens?

When in the Vice Presidential debate Dan Quayle quoted his wealthy Grandmother, Martha Pulliam, as saying, "You can do anything you want to do if you just set your mind to it and work," it contrasted tellingly to a Franklin County student's quote from his parents: "They thought we were just average kids, they never thought we could make it or anything....college was something for only the smart kids to go through." This research sought to understand the difference in the educational socialization experience epitomized in this quote.

Franklin and Adams Counties sit centrally on the south Pennsylvania border with Maryland. Although the counties lie within one hundred miles of Washington D.C. and Baltimore, their character is rural and small-townish. Largely settled after the revolution, by German and English farmers and small-town craftsmen, the initial populations have remained remarkably intact. Fundamentalist Christian religious beliefs dominate religion, with Mennonites and German "Plain People" well represented. In- and out-migration remains limited, and only recently has the Washington/Baltimore Beltway expansion become an influence. In some ways the area reflects the isolation and values of adjacent Appalachia without the poverty and deprivation.

Adjusted 1980 Census figures show Franklin County having a population of 113,000 bunched around two sizeable towns (Chambersburg, the county seat, with 17,000 and Waynesboro 10,000) and several substantial villages in the 2,000-4,000 range. The remainder is either hamlets or rural. Adams County has

a population of 68,000. Except for one major town (Gettysburg, 8,000) and its adjacent National Park plus two other large villages), it is also largely rural. The mean wage for Adams and Franklin Counties runs about the same for Pennsylvania, approximately $15,000.

Large locally owned heavy manufacturing formed the original industrial base. Recently, this base has shifted to foreign or non-local ownership with some development of lighter, high-tech industry. Current economic concern centers on maintaining an industrial base while dealing with the threat of becoming a bedroom community for the fast approaching megalopolis. Industrial leaders struggle with the concept, new to them, of an educated, rather than cheap labor force.

Penn State University/Mont Alto Campus, Shippensburg State University, Wilson College, and Gettysburg College provide higher education in the three-county area. All four institutions serve a both local/state and national constituencies. The Area Vocational Technical School (AVTS or Vo-Tech) represents community-based education but has only a very limited adult-education presence and priority.

PERSPECTIVE OR THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

An in-depth review of the literature preceded the study and found little or no directly related qualitative literature. Considerable indirectly related and very useful research on college-choice behavior among youth (and rural youth in particular), however, does exist. Studies from the field of higher education, rural sociology, and economics all offer valuable insights. Almost all of the work depended on surveys conducted on large samples or analysis of census tract information. Examples:

Higher Education -- A study done by Shu-O Yang (1981) using data from the

National Longitudinal Study of 1972 is typical. He identified factors important in making a decision to attend and to persist in college among high school-age youth. Parental attitudes, particularly encouragement by the mother, proved important variables in future participation in higher education.

Rural Sociology -- A study by Richard Rehberg at the Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration at the University of Oregon, surveying 6000 youth from six Pennsylvania cities typifies this category of research. This study focused on determining if parental encouragement was an intervening variable in the decision to attend college. The researchers found parental encouragement an independent variable in the decision-making process.

Economics -- Gregory Jackson used the Human Capital model (Becker, 1964) in combination with sociological determinants to explain differences in college-choice behavior. He concluded that "since student decisions about college are theoretically eclectic, policy and research should not depend on a single theoretical perspective."

Despite the dearth of ethnographies directly related to college-choice behavior, a rich ethnographic tradition exists in the study of the relationship between social class and educational aspirations.

One of the most useful studies, Jay Macleod's (1987) Ain't No Makin' It provides a richly detailed study of the lives of working class boys in Boston with particular emphasis on their educational aspirations. He describes the erosion of their aspirations and their alienation from education through their life experiences in a public housing project. He further juxtaposes their life experiences against a larger society exemplified in nearby Harvard University.

Macleod uses social-replication theory as the foundation for his study. He places the work of the social-reproduction theorists on a continuum from the most deterministic and structural to the most individualistic. He probes the

work of Bowles (1976), Gintis (1976), Bourdieu (1977), Bernstein (1977), and Giroux (1983) to draw out explanations for the blunted educational aspirations of the poor boys. All of the theoretical constructs provide pertinent frameworks for examining the societal and individual forces leading to the replication of social class. One major limitation for the purposes of this research, however, appears throughout. He interprets the behavior of the subjects as either exclusion or withdrawal from the dominant pattern of socialization. In other words, their lowered aspirations reflect a failure to realize a brighter future, whether understood in terms of a dominant capitalist society or of individual socialization experiences. The results of the instant study suggest that the subjects, far from withdrawing or failing to achieve in the dominant culture, actually have adapted to it. The pervasive nature and unrelenting dominance of the existing cultural patterns in the study area do not so much blunt aspiration as create satisfaction with lower levels of educational achievement, and this phenomenon is the focus of this study.

Kathleen Wilcox (1982) assumes in "Differential Socialization in the Classroom: Implications for Equal Opportunity" the same hierarchical framework but delineates the role of the school. She fully appreciates the circular, mutually reinforcing nature of the interaction between the school and its dominant constituency:

> Speaking within an anthropological framework, it is crucial to keep in mind that schooling is a social institution with a key role in socializing children for available adult roles. Schools are not set up to socialize children for membership in some ideal society; they are set up to socialize children for membership in their own society as it currently exists and as it is likely to exist in the near future....to depart radically from the needs of the culture as currently constituted is to expect a culture to commit suicide.

Macleod's work provided useful guidelines about theoretical constructs and directions to pursue. It applied ethnographic techniques to understanding the interaction of class and education in the development of aspirations in

general, if not specific, to the college decision-making process.

The decision to attend, or more importantly, not to attend college, is crucial in the ultimate attainment of social mobility. This pivotal life decision provides a focus for understanding the impact of a dominant working-class culture on the perpetuation of individual social immobility. The microscopic examination of the college participation choice process allows a macroscopic view of the culture.

METHODOLOGY

This study of college participation rates in rural southcentral Pennsylvania draws on literature in a variety of areas, among them economics, education, and sociology. At the heart of the endeavor, however, lies a series of ethnographic interviews conducted over the course of six months in Adams and Franklin Counties. Following the tradition of Michael Harrington's classic work on poverty in America, the authors sought to study college participation by leaving the interstate highways and traveling instead into the valleys and small towns of Pennsylvania to engage people in their own communities. This approach affords the researcher the opportunity to hear first hand the hopes, fears, and attitudes of rural Pennsylvanians coming to terms with their individual and collective futures in regard to educational and occupational aspirations.

Ethnographic methodologies permit what anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) calls "thick description" and allow for a dense multi-faceted interpretation of the manifold cultural and societal influences which impact upon an individual's decision on going to college. Ethnographies seek in-depth understanding of the underlying constructs which determine a particular outcome. In turn, ethnographic method affords the researcher the opportunity

to explore not only established outcomes or hypotheses but also the development of new or diverse hypotheses. The employment of ethnographic techniques marks a new approach to the study of the college decision.

Previous research has contributed much to understanding post-secondary education participation rates, but they have had limited ability to explain going to college as a cultural phenomenon or, by relying on outcomes research, to elucidate the process by which individuals and families make that decision. The difficulty in using outcomes research to address sociological issues goes beyond higher education. For instance, Macleod notes in reviewing several decades of research on social-class fixation that "qualitative mobility studies can establish the extent of this pattern of social reproduction, but they have difficulty demonstrating how the pattern comes into being or is sustained" (1987, pg. 2). Similarly, it is well established in education that the probability that an individual will pursue postsecondary education substantially increases if the parents have done so. But it remains unclear how the value of education is transmitted from one generation of a family to the next or, in the case of rural Pennsylvanians, how a relatively negative attitude towards higher education participation is so perpetuated.

An increasing number of researchers have recognized the limitations of prior research to explain fully the college decision and have called for further research both to expand the areas under study and to explore new methodologies. The Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and University (PACU), for instance, conclude in their study that "future research is needed on the factors which influence the processes of decision making" by which students make career and educational choices (1984, pg. 14). Further, Stage and Hossler have suggested that the employment of qualitative research techniques should provide additional insights into the questions of how parental aspirations influence student educational plans and how parents communicate their

expectations to their children (1988).

Prior research, institutionally based and somewhat self-serving, has too often focused on choice-of-college behavior rather than on patterns in the more basic, to-go-or-not-to-go choice -- much of it aimed at maintaining enrollment at a time of dramatic demographic shifts. The perspective of this work is that of the initial, individual, basic choice.

The rationale for selection of method has three parts: first, it is interactive between informant and researcher, therefore not bound by the instrument constraints and open to the mutual exploration of ideas and concepts rich in detail and description; second, it allows for the development of hypotheses in addition to the study of known outcomes; and third, it assures focus on the decision-making process itself, within a familial and cultural context rather than on the outcome of that process.

Initially, this study envisaged two pools of respondents:

One, families of children in elementary school, as previous research indicates that the college decision is often already made before junior high school; and

Two, recent high school graduates not attending college, to reflect retrospectively on their negative college decision while the experience was still relatively recent and important to them.

However, as the study evolved it became apparent that the inclusion of interviews from an expanded pool of respondents would enrich ("thicken," in Geertz' concept) the research. This mid-stream addition of informants met ethnographic-method standards in that the researchers deferred judgment on significance until the orienting phase of the field study had ended (Spindler, 1982, p. 6). The researchers conducted additional interviews with school and community leaders and with a cadre of individuals from the area currently attending college and made supplemental observations in various school and

community settings. The subjects came through local school officials' identification of elementary school students' and recent high school graduates' families, through volunteers solicited from current students at Penn State's Mont Alto Campus who listed Adams, Franklin, or neighboring Fulton Counties as home, and through recommendations by either initial informants or school or local officials. In total, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with forty-four individuals and/or families, employing both grand-tour and guided-tour open-end formats (Spradley, 1979), which enriches ("thickens") data, recognizes the informant as an equal partner in the research, and allows mutual exploration of new topics as they arise. These interviews form the base of the data on which the analyses proceeded.

Analysis of the data occurred simultaneously with collection of the data and continued after its completion. Glaser's constant comparative method of qualitative analysis (1967) served as the analytical framework. This method has four steps, each employed in this study: "(1) comparing incidents applicable to each category, (2) integrating categories and their properties, (3) delimiting the theory, and (4) writing the theory" (Glaser, pg. 105).

ANALYSIS

The dominant socializing influences of family, school, and community form the basis for analysis of the data. Although each of these influences are discussed individually, they inextricably intertwine, each depending on the other for shape, direction, and intensity. Regardless of the heuristic illustration of the interrelationship, the dynamic two-way nature of each influence on the other remains paramount.

This research sought to understand the gestalt of each individual's experience from their own perspective. The collective of the individual

experiences provided the base for understanding of the community interactions and responses. How did each of the three forces influence each individual and, in turn, how did each individual represent and eventually influence the community? Why does the collective of each individual's experiences interact with his/her family, school, and community to lead eventually to the replication of the current social structure and stratification in contradiction to the American dream of social mobility and opportunity?

THE FAMILY

The prevailing American dream predicates each succeeding generation's exceeding the goals and outcome of the previous. Middle-class families inculcate the notion that their children should not only emulate them and enter the middle class but, with the proper combination of social and intellectual skills, do even better. Middle-class parents, even in Franklin County, share this dream. Carol's parents talked about their daughter's future and their perception of working class neighbors' views:

> I feel strongly about Carol going to college because I know the difference it makes in your life overall in the long term....I think that the point I made that it was very important for my parents for me to go to college is very different. Around here people want their kids to do what they did.

Carol's mother suggested an underlying reason for these attitudes:

> I do a lot of work with the Scouts and a lot of the women I deal with...have this really big self-confidence problem....they say I can't do that and you darn well know they could if they would just do it, they feel very uncomfortable putting themselves in role model situation ....I wonder if they encourage the children to do much more than what they think they can do.

Working class families support Carol's mother's view. They have great difficulty dreaming and therefore planning for careers for their children which

exceed their own in status and income. They have enough satisfaction in their own lives that they feel very limited need to subscribe to a better and brighter future for their children.

As a machinist commented:

> ...success is having a good life - not careers.

A college student recalled her working-class parents' attitude toward education:

> They always wanted us to do well in school, but after school wasn't talked about at all.

And another student described his parents' response to his decision to go to college:

> They just laughed at me....they were very unsupportive. They didn't make fun of me or anything. It was just the way they thought you couldn't make it.

Few parents acted as negatively as the one described immediately above. More typical was a laissez-faire attitude toward education and future careers. As a result, much of the responsibility for career choice fell on very young teenagers. Working-class parents shied at taking a proactive role in planning with their child for the future, almost as if planning with the child became somehow an unwarranted intrusion into the child's life. The idea that each should choose his/her own destiny was a firmly held and oft-repeated value. This sharply contrasts to the dominant middle-class parents' ethic of insisting that children aspire to and plan for high educational and career objectives.

A recent non-college high school graduate, reflecting on his decision against college, said that though his parents wished he had gone to college, they were not disappointed because:

> Both of them, Mom and Dad, have always said, "Don't matter what you do, just be the best at what you do -- be a garbage collector, carpenter, or whatever you want to be -- just do the best at whatever you're going to do.

Another student now in college said her working-class parents:

> Wouldn't tell me much. It was my choice what I wanted to do.

As early as second grade, this laissez-faire approach already evidenced itself. Parents of eight-year-old Charlie said:

> We really feel that the boy should make his own decision ...we won't pressure him to go to college.

Perhaps the attitude is best exemplified by a recent high school graduate who opted for college prep but then did not go to college:

> It's like most of the people around here will use their back instead of their brains, and while there is nothing wrong with that...I mean its like what you really want... their parents have lived here for years and years and their grandparents before them.

But middle-class parents talking said of eight-year-old daughter:

> We don't work in specific terms -- other than she will go to college....we won't force her but she is very bright and I think she will want to....I will pretty much steer her that way...we will pretty much let her do what she wants education-wise maybe!...with advice.

The middle-class parents were far more proactive and confident in their role as major influences in their children's career choice. Working-class parents produced social replication almost by default.

SCHOOLS

The schools of southcentral Pennsylvania reflect the dominant working class culture. The more basic question, however, remains: how do they create and perpetuate this dominant cultural adaptation? Do the schools act as leaders or merely follow societal stratification and immobility? Remembering Wilcox's statement about the essential job of schools to reflect realistically the community's current need, how innovative can the schools afford to be? The people governing and staffing Franklin and Adams Counties' schools are clearly responsive to the working class agenda of the community. The structure

and operating ethos of the systems thoroughly reaffirm the values of hard work and early career decision.

The AVTS or Vo-Tech system in Franklin County exemplifies this value. In the ninth grade, students choose which programs they will enter: Vo-Tech, College Prep, General, or in some schools, Business. The first two are by far the most common choices. The Vo-Tech structure effectively segregates the students from the rest of the school population. Starting in the ninth-grade, Vo-Tech students attend the AVTS for three weeks and then return to their "home school" for three weeks. These students not only spend half of their time out of their neighborhood schools, they spend their "home school" time exclusively with fellow Vo-Tech students due to the necessity of packaging their general education into three-week blocs.

Many parents and participants hold the Vo-Tech system in high regard. They see the link between skills learned at Vo-Tech and successful entry into the job market. The parents of a second-grader illustrated this:

> I would hope that Charlie would want to go to Vo-Tech ....I think that the Vo-Tech is one of the best things going. The kids coming out of Vo-Tech are better able to find jobs then are the kids coming out of college prep.

Even former Vo-Tech students who eventually entered college felt that the Vo-Tech had provided useful training. Jane commented about her choice to go to Vo-Tech:

> I went to Vo-Tech because I thought Vo-Tech would give me a better job. I might as well go up there and get a trade, I can always fall back on that.

However, as one high school counselor commented, Vo-Tech is a double edged sword. A one-way street makes a more apt metaphor to describe many of the students' experiences. While preparing students for jobs, it also effectively segregates them from broader and alternative opportunities and reduces their possibility of going on to higher education. Out of the 25 to 33 percent of

the overall school population in Franklin County opting for Vo-Tech, only 5 percent eventually go on to higher education. The age at which students make the college or Vo-Tech choice exacerbates this narrowing of options. The interviews with the working class students who eventually went on to college demonstrate resentment and frustration with the Vo-Tech experience. They remember poignantly the academic restrictions and the social exclusion.

Sam recalled:

> Because I was in Vo-Tech I didn't get to meet that many people. When we were in the main school we were always with Vo-Tech people and I didn't like that -- I wished we were with other people.

and even more specifically about the choice process:

> He (the counselor) treated it like a big serious career decision. I was really scared like this was going to determine the rest of my life or something.

Sam did not realize how his reflections as a ninth-grader mirrored reality for most Vo-Tech students. They were making a decision for the rest of their lives, an awesome responsibility for a ninth-grader whose parents had opted out of the decision process.

Jane remembered with great sorrow being socially ostracized following her Vo-Tech decison:

> I didn't really like Vo-Tech. I liked the people but I didn't like the stereotype. I was totally stereotyped. My classmates said, "she's a hick." I had a lot of trouble adjusting because in junior high although I wasn't popular, everybody knew me. And then I went to Vo-Tech. There were a lot of people who would not even talk to me. We were not associated much with the regular kids.

She also felt academically unchallenged:

> I knew I didn't have the background (for college). All the classes were just general. I felt like I wasn't getting enough....a lot of teachers think you are not as smart as the other kids....Vo-Tech students should be treated like all other students and given a choice.

Adams County has no AVTS, therefore provides a contrasting structure for

considering the impact of early Vo-Tech streaming. Although income level in Adams County and general industrial base are very similar to Franklin County, the participation rate in higher education runs a little higher. Students and parents relate a rather different career-choice experience. Working-class parents still maintain a hands-off approach to career planning, but, in the absence of the need to make a decision to opt for Vo-Tech in the ninth grade, the student has greater opportunity for longer exposure to a wider range of career options and fellow students with varying educational goals. Franklin County students' recollections of social and academic segregation of "techies" and "preppies" were not replicated among Adams County students.

Ted, from a Littlestown working-class family but in the college-prep program, made the point:

> It's a small school so I knew everybody, who they were and a little about them. Mostly college prep and general classes were where most of my friends were from, but also from Vo-Ag and work study.

Asked about segregation of tracks, Ted saw difference in friendship patterns in terms of common classes, as did the Franklin County students, but the patterns seemed not so pervasively maintained as those in Franklin County. Ted's memories contrasted with Kathy's, a former Franklin County Vo-Tech student and now a Dean' List sophomore at Penn State:

> The kids in college prep were from better homes than we were from -- more money and better clothes -- they just seemed like they were smarter than we were and like they knew what they were doing and we really didn't. We just didn't think it (college) was something we could do -- it was just kind of a scary idea. I stayed away from them (the middle-class kids). There're also cliques -- you find your own.

Another student, Theo from Littlestown, with college-educated parents, spoke of the same mixture of friends and lack of stratification patterns:

> I was friends with everyone. I knew all the kids and it's the same here at Mont Alto -- most of my friends did not want to go to college.

As Freire (1970) says, "There is no neutral education." It is not simply enough to note the impact of the Vo-Tech system and move on. However, the description of Vo-Tech's impact on the perpetuation of stratification and social immobility should not be read as condemnation of Vo-Tech in concept or reality, but rather as an analysis of its total impact on the community. Undoubtedly, as proponents proclaim, it provides a very useful educational experience leading to immediate working-class employment and satisfying careers -- so satisfying in fact that considerable desire exists to continue that satisfaction through successive generations. Vo-Tech training did and does prepare students for jobs in Franklin County, a vital function of an educational system. But it also appears to have the concommitant effect of narrowing career choices and forcing early vocational decision. This study has no judgmental intentions or mandate, only analytical. The community will decide the merits of the current system's effects.

Although the area proclivity towards vocational education and its impact on the overall educational experience emerges as the predominant theme of this study, respondents identified other concerns about their schooling. For example, counseling drew negative comments. A 31-year-old woman beginning her college career thirteen years after high school graduation, complained:

> I can only remember two two-minute meetings with counselors. "What are you doing? Are you going to go to college? O.K., you're fine." I was doing O.K. but maybe a little push would have been needed.

A recent high school graduate remembered the laissez-faire attitude toward his decision not to attend college:

> You can't push a kid to go to school but at the same time you've got to give him a little shove. In general, I wanted to go to school, but I didn't, and it was like well, as things were he said, "If you ever want to come and talk." So I went to talk to him a couple times and he was helpful and understanding and all, but then that was it.

Not all stressed disappointment, but their attitude showed ambivalence toward the counselor role in aiding adolescents with career and educational decisions. The mother of an eighth-grader asked what role she envisioned for counselors in her son's plans, said simply:

> ...when I think of guidance...I don't know why, but I think of kids in trouble.

The tone of the counseling comments matched that of the study in suggesting that the school experience tends to reinforce the dominant social values in the community rather than challenge the status quo. This differs markedly from the ethos of inner-city schools, who tend to see themselves as agents of change and challengers of the status quo. They see their students' only hope in the school's ability to inculcate motivation to change, to succeed, and to get out. This divergence appears on two fronts. The status quo in Franklin and Adams County is neither terrible nor deprived; on the contrary, it is, for many, the American dream. And, far from wanting to get out of this community, people want to stay. The school system has effectively provided a way to do this. Should the school system now take a different tack as other employment opportunities for college graduates become available and as college education becomes the entry-level currency for many new positions? Many business leaders argue that schools should review their structures and policies. This research suggests an arduous and difficult process, confronting many widely held basic values.

COMMUNITY

The notion that the community at the same time both mirrors and shapes the attitudes and aspirations of its individual members underpins the theme of this paper. Communal influences impact on an individual's college decision,

and the individual's decision, once made, influences the decisions of others. These influences, multi-faceted and complex, relect the totality of the influences discussed in the previous two sections.

Individual thoughts on the role of the family, the need for education and the influences of school converge to create overarching public opinion. This opinion demonstrates a subconscious recognition of the "human capital model." A local college counselor, after an hour-long discussion on the aspirations of the area's youth, concluded:

> education is not seen as a vehicle to success. People love to stay here; they're homebodies, therefore, the question is, "What do I need to do to get a job here?"

This quote is not atypical. That Franklin County is a good place to live and raise a family was repeatedly affirmed and apparently embedded in the minds of children at an early age. A sign in Mrs. Jones' second-grade classroom read:

> Smithville, Pennsylvania - A Great Place to Live, Work and Raise a Family.

Obtaining a college education represents a potential threat to remaining in the area. A second-grader's mother stressed this point in recalling how her college-educated niece accepted a position well below her qualifications simply to remain in the area. She noted:

> Kids go to college, but then they can't get a job around here if they want to live here.

Leaving the community provided perspective and motivation for some current college students from working class families. Living in another town or joining the military gave them with a view of the world which directly challenged their previously held vision of their "place." Sam commented about his Army experience:

> I met this one guy. He had finally realized that he should go to school and make something of himself and that's what I decided to do, too. A year or two after

> high school you might start thinking you're not really doing anything with your life. You don't have any direction; you're not headed for anything. You finally realize, it finally comes to you (to go to college). In high school I was never planning to go to college.

Kathy had a similar realization:

> Going away from Chambersburg was good, and the military was good also and gave you a sense of confidence. I realized that we are all just people and even though they started out better off, I could end up better than them. There is nothing to be afraid of.

The power and the pervasiveness of commonly held values underlie Kathy's statement. Social stratification was a given for her during her high school experience. Only after leaving could she see the community and her "place" in it in a more realistic way. The college decision-making process offers only one example of the interaction between individual and community, but that example provides an effective means of understanding how the community reinforces or challenges existing social structures.

Franklin and Adams Counties sell the concept that they are the American dream. The Franklin County Area Development Corporation promotional literature boasts:

> Traditions like brotherhood, a healthy work ethic, deep religious roots, and a strong sense of family have been passed on for generations.
>
> A Willing and Able Work Force
>
> Franklin County has an available and diversified work force that is productive, dependable and based on an extremely strong and traditional work ethic. Our work force includes a substantial number of craftsmen, machine operators, and other manufacturing occupations. When coupled with the Franklin County Vocation-Technical School, which annually graduates more than 400 students, employers can find an available and manageable work force that is marred with very few strikes or work stoppages. Turnover rates in Franklin County are consistently well below national averages.

The brochure also quotes a leading industrial manager:

> Franklin County has all the attributes that make it the right location for our company. For one, the people

> are good, solid, and dependable employees. It is the Franklin County worker who has helped make our company a success.

The question is, have these attributes come at the cost of a narrower horizon for many of its young people? Would they, given a climate more supportive of higher education, have dreamed -- and possibly achieved -- a different American dream?

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Focusing on the college decision-making process provided an effective starting point for a more comprehensive understanding of the self-perpetuating nature of class structure in rural and small town America. With education such an important component of mobility in America, the college choice process allows some generalizing about the community, providing a glimpse of an intrenched bi-polar class structure, tacitly supported both by the upper- and middle-class beneficiaries and by the working class who would appear to have less to gain.

Other ethnographies have tended to focus on the failure of a community to provide the good life as the reason for perpetuation of the under-class or lack of aspiration. Here, an anomaly: life is just good enough for almost everybody and very good for a few. The traditional motivators for generations of Americans to escape from poverty and ugly slums are not present. The social values of family and hard work have produced comfort and self-satisfaction. The relative isolation and lack of migration have not juxtaposed the larger American dream against the lives of the people in Franklin and Adams Counties. They have described and embraced their own version of the dream and, to a great extent, it has worked for them.

The role of the ethnographer is not simply to describe, but also to

understand, in a context larger than that of the study population, the events and structures which impinge on their lives. Research should lead to an empowerment of the individual and community subjects. As Patti Lather states in Research as Praxis (1986):

> I argue that we must go beyond the concern for more and better data to a concern for research as praxis. What I suggest is that we consciously use our research to help participants understand and change their situations.

Research should allow the participants to make more informed and useful decisions than they might otherwise. From that perspective some suggestions about Franklin and Adams County and the future are warranted. The school system which has served the community so well may have a stagnating effect as the community attempts to meet the needs of more technically-advanced industry. The values of hard work, family solidarity, and college education may be perceived as less mutually exclusive in a time of expanding opportunities than in more constricted times. Franklin and Adams County can build on their obvious strengths to rework the structures of their school systems, to provide greater access, and to allow more mobility. However, community leaders' views of the need for a more technically advanced work force must be translated into resources for improving opportunities for post-secondary education for a larger group of students. Higher education institutions in the area must expand their vision of their responsibilities to include entering into informed partnerships to foster greater appreciation of education not only as a way to enter the professions but also as an end in itself.

This research provided only a tantalizing glimpse into a part of American life that probably will substantially change over the next generation. The availability of educational opportunities will greatly influence the direction of that change. Franklin and Adams County can build their own populations into the work force of the future or they will have to rely on migration to meet the

needs of area business and industry. Further research and analysis can contribute to understanding and productive change.

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